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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUGS — NO. 1

Tuesday, March 4, 1930.

U. S. Department of Agriculture
A series of radio talks by W. R. M. Wharton, chief, Eastern District, Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered Tuesday mornings at 10 a.m. Eastern Standard Time through Station WJZ, New York and the following other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company: KWK, St. Louis; WREN, Kansas City; KFAB, Lincoln, Neb.; WRC, Washington; WBZA, Boston; KSTP, St. Paul; WSM, Nashville; WAPI, Birmingham; WJAX, Jacksonville, WPTF, Raleigh; and WRVA, Richmond.

Address No. 1

My friends, I have been in the game of enforcing the Federal Food and Drugs Act for more than twenty years. The Federal Food & Drugs Act was designed to insure the purity and wholesomeness, and the honesty of labeling, of the foods you folks use, and to guarantee for you the purity and proper branding of your food and drug supplies. In other words, it was designed to prevent the sale to you of adulterated, debased and poisonous foods and to protect you from fraud when you purchase foods and drugs. Necessarily, I have had in all these years many interesting experiences. I have seen many worthless, many fraudulent, many adulterated, and many misbranded products eliminated entirely from the commerce of the nation. I have seen many crooks driven from the food and drug trades. I have seen many illegal systems and illegal practices of merchandising entirely disappear, and some of these had had a generation of foothold.

In this series of Radio Talks, I expect to tell you of my personal experiences, my experiences with illegal products, with adulterated foods and drugs, and about some of the crooks in the food and drug industries and something of their methods as well. I shall aim to tell you some of the things you ought to know about your foods and drugs, and how they are safeguarded. I shall tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Every assertion, every statement I make is supported by irrefutable records — mostly judgments of the Federal Courts. You may believe every word, no matter how amazing, no matter how incredible, no matter how strange.

Now, today I propose to relate in a story concerning the ADULTERATION OF GROUND BLACK PEPPER, and tell a tale of the SALE OF TABLE SALT AT MORE THAN FIFTEEN THOUSAND DOLLARS PER POUND.

Some years back, on a certain day in May, there was filed in the United States District Court in New York City a libel against a large quantity of ground black pepper. The Government was seeking its seizure for condemnation. This pepper had been shipped to New York from the State of Maryland. The libel alleged that the so-called Pure, Ground, Black Pepper was not Pure, Ground, Black Pepper, but that the product was adulterated and misbranded in violation of the Federal Food and Drugs Act. This lot of so-called Pure, Ground, Black Pepper was seized, impounded, and held subject to the order of the Court.

Out of this seizure grew a court trial, the firm who prepared the goods and shipped them in interstate commerce having previously appeared as claimant of the alleged "PURE GROUND BLACK PEPPER." The court, after hearing all the evidence, found the pepper adulterated and misbranded as charged.

(over)

The facts in this case are that previously it had been discovered that this spice dealer had been importing large quantities of pepper shells. Pepper shells are the hulls of pepper berries. Pepper shells are not pepper. Pepper shells are a poor substitute for pepper.

Examination of this spice dealer's output of pure, ground, black pepper did not reveal certainly that pepper shells were being used as an adulterant and, therefore, it was suspected that this spice dealer was using scientific control in his mixing of pepper shells with pepper, so as to defy detection by ordinary chemical means. Accordingly, when a large shipment of pepper shells arrived at an American port from abroad, intended for this same spice dealer, agents of the Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration secretly introduced what is known as a "marker" into each bag of these pepper shells. A solution of quinine alkaloid was sprayed into each bag of the pepper shells - the idea being that if these pepper shells were subsequently used as an adulterant of ground pepper, the ground pepper would give a test for quinine alkaloid. Quinine is naturally entirely foreign to pepper.

In due course the pepper shells were delivered to the factory of the concern in question. A Food & Drug Inspector secretly watched the delivery of the pepper shells - the same pepper shells that were "marked" - "marked," mind you, with quinine, to permit of their identification later - and, remember, the spice dealer didn't know the pepper shells were "marked." Subsequently, a shipment of Pure, Ground Pepper was made by the spice dealer who had received the "marked" pepper shells. This shipment was made to New York. This was the shipment against which libel was filed. This was the shipment which was seized. The libel charged that pepper shells had been added to the pepper which was labeled as "PURE GROUND BLACK PEPPER," and that, therefore, the product was adulterated and misbranded. The court trial begins; the spice dealer has declared himself innocent; he has denied that the Pure Ground Pepper contains added pepper shells. The Government presents its case; Government Inspectors testify that they put quinine in the pepper shells, and Government Chemists testify that they found the quinine in the alleged Pure, Black Pepper. The Chemists found in the pepper the same quinine which had been added to the pepper shells; Until now the spice dealer was unaware of the fact that a "marker", quinine, had been placed in the pepper shells and, of course, consternation reigned in his camp when the Government introduced testimony to the effect that it knew that the "Pure Ground Black Pepper" was adulterated with pepper shells, because the Government had marked the pepper shells with quinine, and had found the quinine in the "Pure Ground Black Pepper", so that there could be no mistake about it. The court found the pure ground pepper was adulterated with pepper shells, ordered its forfeiture, and another form of adulteration, another form of cheat received a solar plexus blow.

This, my friends, is but one of hundreds of cases of the detection of adulteration of spices. Actions brought under the Federal Food and Drugs Act have resulted in a substantial degree of purity of the spices on the American market at the present time. Adulteration of spices is very, very rare today.

I promised you I would tell you about the sale of common table salt at Fifteen Thousand Dollars per Pound. This statement is no exaggeration. It is a matter of cold fact. Of course, the salt was not sold as salt. Instead, it was sold as Neosalvarsan. - And this is how it happened: Early in the Great War, Neosalvarsan, a German-manufactured product, became practically unobtainable in this country. Neosalvarsan is a complex arsenic preparation used hypodermically for the cure of a serious disease. Because of its scarcity, the price of the genuine product rose steadily, until a single ampoule containing .9 of a gram, had a market value of \$30.00. When circumstances such as these arise, that is, when products increase in price because of scarcity, the Government Food and Drug agents are especially careful to check the composition of such articles found in the channels of trade which are so affected by trade conditions. This, because such circumstances are known by experience to lead to adulteration. This chemical check method developed the information that in a few of our larger cities there were stocks of products in what appeared to be original Neosalvarsan ampoules. They were labeled with what appeared to be original German-manufactured Neosalvarsan labels, but these packages contained yellow-colored table salt, instead of genuine Neosalvarsan.

Almost every dealer holding this spurious article told a similar story: A man - sometimes it was a woman - had called and said that he, or she, had a friend who had smuggled genuine Neosalvarsan from Germany, via Switzerland. The friend had asked for help in selling it.

Upon examination the packages looked real enough. Because of the scarcity of the article, the druggist approached usually bought from the stranger. Your Food & Drug Agent continued quietly at work.

The maker of the glass ampoule-containers was located in Chicago. The printer who made fake labels was located in Indianapolis. A complete description of the man in the case was obtained from them. The buyers of the spurious Neosalvarsan described both the man and the woman. Your present speaker found that they had stopped at a small hotel in St. Louis. A maid at the hotel remembered the pair. She had peeped in their baggage and had seen thousands of little funny looking glass bottles, as she called the ampoules. But the schemers had flown. They had been gone nearly two weeks. Did the hotel clerk know where they went? No. Did he know who handled their trunks? O! yes! he had put in the order himself - The Blank Express Company. Did the Blank Express Company have a record of what disposition they made of the baggage? Certainly; their records showed that they checked three large trunks and a few pieces of hand baggage to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Then the chase began: to Tulsa, too late; to Oklahoma City, again too late, but close now; to Dallas, Texas - a carefully planned arrest. These criminals were doing too much harm to take any chances on their getting away again. At last the pair of them are placed behind the bars. They are tried, and both the man and the woman were sent to the penitentiary for conspiracy to violate the Federal Food and Drugs Act.

The scheme had been hatched and the spurious Neosalvarsan had been prepared in an Indianapolis retail drug store by a one-time drug clerk; and he had employed his lady friend to help him dispose of the spurious goods. If they had not been detected in the early stages of the game,

they would have flooded the country with this spurious Neosalvarsan. Not only was it worthless as a medicine and a fraud, but the more serious aspect of the matter is that persons using this spurious Neosalvarsan for a serious disease would get no benefit and, being deprived of the genuine, might and probably would develop, in after life, blindness - perhaps, locomotor ataxia. I leave it to you, my friends - Has there ever been a more heinous crime?

Over Fifteen Thousand Dollars per Pould for Table Salt! You may calculate this for yourselves: Each .9 of a gram of table salt - thirty dollars; there are 453.6 grams in a pould - 453.6 divided by .9, multiplied by thirty, equals more than Fifteen Thousand Dollars per pound for table salt.

My friends, it is by actions such as these that your Food and Drug supply is safeguarded through the medium of the enforcement of the Federal Food and Drugs Act. Nearly Seventeen thousand completed court cases, reported as Notices of Judgment, represent the cold record.
